



News Release

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UDOH Awards Utah's Healthy Gold Medal Schools \$67,000

Elementary Schools Are Seeing the Benefits of Change

(SALT LAKE CITY) – More than half of Utah's elementary school students and teachers will take home healthier habits this summer as a reward for their commitment to the Gold Medal Schools (GMS) program. GMS is a unique, Utah Department of Health (UDOH) program developed to give students and school staff opportunities to eat healthy, be active, and stay tobacco-free.

More than 200 Utah public, private and charter schools will receive cash incentives ranging from \$200 to \$1,000 to be used to purchase P.E. equipment and nutrition and tobacco-prevention resources. The program also awards plaques for meeting program criteria in award levels of Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum, and Platinum Focus.

But the cash is the least of the program rewards. Jessica LeNeave, a 5th grade teacher at Summit Academy—a Draper charter school that joined GMS just one year ago but soared straight to Gold level—can attest to all the GMS benefits. After being diagnosed with lung disease and suffering through two knee surgeries, LeNeave was not living the active, healthy lifestyle she wanted – and needed.

“When I heard about GMS in my training at Summit Academy I knew that this was the year I needed to change my ways,” said LeNeave. “My knee was healing and I needed to build up my lungs and GMS gave me the hope and the courage to act,” she added. “I knew that if I was asking my students to be active, I needed to be active as well.”

LeNeave quickly caught on to the excitement about health she says has now become a part of the school's culture. “It's just amazing. We have so much school community involvement,” she said. “Parents have come in to help out. The kids are excited about getting active, and many have even joined community sports and are urging their friends to do the same.”

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You can recognize a Gold Medal School many ways. Some have a walking program on or around school grounds that sets a goal for each student; teachers are using incentives other than food as rewards; comprehensive tobacco-free school policies are in place; and wellness activities for faculty and staff are as common as reading, writing and arithmetic.

“I could never have imagined that the program would give me the strength to better my own life. In many ways it has kept me out of the hospital and in the classroom, which is where I love to be the most,” says LeNeave. Because of her lung disease, LeNeave is normally out of work for much of the winter with pneumonia or bronchitis—but not this year. “I have found the energy to be a crazy fifth-grade teacher day in and day out.” As an added bonus, because of all her hard work, LeNeave lost some weight and gained the confidence she needed to wear the white gown she was married in last month.

Schools across the state are seeing successes like LeNeave's as a result of Gold Medal Schools: healthier students and staff, fewer behavioral issues, better attendance and improved academic performance. Now wrapping up its sixth successful year, GMS has already reached 287 elementary schools, 146,000 students, and 6,600 teachers in Utah. And with almost two million Gold Medal Miles walked, 387 healthy school nutrition and physical activity policies implemented, and 708 healthy changes made to school environments, the program is creating the ‘Tradition of Health’ its vision statement strives for, and is helping schools to impact Utah's growing childhood obesity epidemic—one student, and one teacher at a time.

For more information on Gold Medal Schools, and for a complete list of participating schools and their award levels, as well as additional success stories, please visit:

www.hearthishighway.org/gms.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death; assuring access to affordable, quality health care; and promoting healthy lifestyles.